



Global Security and Defense Challenges: General Portolano's Warning on Kosovo, Lebanon, and Mission Cuts

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Rome, June 17, 2026 – A rapidly changing geopolitical landscape, threats to the vital nodes of the global economy, and the axe of budget cuts that risk compromising the efficiency of the Italian Armed Forces. It is a comprehensive analysis, marked by strong calls for caution, outlined by the Chief of Defense Staff, General **Luciano Portolano**, during his hearing in response to the joint Foreign and Defense Committees of the Chamber and Senate.

In his speech, the General touched on the main operational theaters in which Italy is involved, issuing precise warnings about the challenges of the coming years.

Kosovo: The risk of a hasty withdrawal and the Russian shadow

The first warning concerns the Balkans and the potential downward adjustment of the **KFOR** mission in Kosovo. According to Portolano, any assessment of a reduction in forces must be conducted in a "truly prudent and accurate" manner.

The concrete risk is exposing the area to a rapid deterioration of security, due to unresolved tensions between Pristina and Belgrade. There is also a strong geopolitical risk: a withdrawal not supported by a careful political *strategic assessment* would leave a void easily fillable by external *stakeholders*. The General's reference is directly to **Russia**. For this reason, in concert with Defense Minister Guido Crosetto, Portolano sent a letter to NATO's Supreme Commander, Gen. Grynkewich, to highlight the risks of this potential reduction.

Lebanon: An ONU umbrella needed for the post-UNIFIL

On the Middle Eastern front, the focus is on the future of Lebanon and the role of the international community. For the post-UNIFIL, the Chief of Defense Staff considers it essential to maintain current operational capabilities – including the naval component – under a renewed **"United Nations umbrella"**.

Despite doubts about the acceptance of such a resolution by Israel, Portolano considers support for the **Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)** vital. The LAF are considered the key element to achieving the demilitarization and disarmament of **Hezbollah**. This support should not be limited to training (*capacity building*) and financial support, but should include a strong operational component on the ground. A leading role in this new setup, he emphasized, should be assumed by the **European Union**.

Budget Warning: Mission cuts and impact on efficiency

The most critical aspect for internal management concerns the **underfunding of the exercise sector**, which is undermining the availability, safety standards, training, and maintenance of Defense vehicles and infrastructure.

The numbers illustrated by the General depict a complex situation:

- **2026 Requirement:** estimated at about **1.8 billion** euros.
- **Actual Availability:** stands at **1.039 billion** euros.

- **Contraction:** a decrease of **6%** is recorded compared to the 2025 framework, resulting in a cut of about 89 million euros.

This discrepancy has made a "comprehensive remodulation of devices" inevitable to try to safeguard primary strategic objectives even with fewer resources.

Choke Points: Beyond Hormuz, the vital node of the Red Sea

Finally, attention has shifted to the security of international maritime routes. While the Strait of **Hormuz** remains a sensitive point of conflict between the USA, Israel, and Iran, the simultaneous or alternate inhibition of the straits of **Bab el-Mandeb** and **Suez** would represent a devastating blow, forcing Mediterranean traffic to pass only through Gibraltar.

The data highlighted by Portolano clearly illustrate the weight of these bottlenecks (*choke points*):

- **Bab el-Mandeb:** handles just under **15%** of maritime commercial traffic and **10%** of global energy traffic.
- **Suez:** ensures the transit of about **40%** of Italy's commercial exchange.
- **Digital Backbones:** the seabeds of the Red Sea host **15** of the main fiber optic backbones for global cabling.

The blockage of these routes would generate a "systemic crisis" worse than the energy shocks of the Gulf wars, paralyzing global logistics and severely penalizing Italy and the countries of the Mediterranean basin.